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Floreen to alter development authority proposal

Requirement for private feuding would be eliminated

County News | Erin Cunningham

Montgomery County Council President Nancy M. Floreen said Monday that she will remove a provision of her proposed Economic Development Authority that would have had the private sector fund it.

Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park said she expects to have a revised draft of the plan ready by the middle of next week and will be ready to introduce it later this month.

Floreen's current draft proposal states, "The partnership must also raise private funds"

In January, shortly after Floreen was named council president, she proposed a new county Economic Development Authority, which she described as a "high-level private-public body."

Floreen said she received "tremendous input" about her proposal.

Most were receptive to the concept, Floreen said, but her draft proposal drew criticism from the business community and some fellow council members — primarily over her plan to have businesses pay to join the authority.

"This is an effort to validate and encourage a business voice, and we want this to be owned by the business community in the long run, and they will have to set their own parameters about how this will function," Floreen said during a briefing with the media Monday.

Lisa Fadden, vice president of public affairs for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, said Monday that she preferred not to comment until she had viewed a revised draft.

Renne: MCGEO taking 'hard look' at three on council

Three Montgomery County Council members were not invited to speak during Tuesday's press conference and rally for the government employees' union: Phil Andrews, Roger Berliner and Duchy Trachtenberg.

Gino Renne, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1994/Municipal and County Government Employees Organization, said the other six council members "appreciate the value of our membership."

"As the election moves along, those three are clearly three elected officials we're taking a hard look at," Renne said.

From budget director to bodyguard

Joseph Beach, the county's director of management and budget, is a "bodyguard these days," County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) joked during a meeting with the County Council on Tuesday.

A question regarding some grim aspect of the budget sent council members and Leggett searching for Beach, who was standing against a wall in the conference room.

"He's hiding," one council member said.

That is when Leggett remarked that Beach had taken over bodyguard duties, drawing laughter from the two dozen staff and elected officials in the room.

Leventhal looks for agreement over ambulance fee

Montgomery County Council President Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park said Monday that she will support County Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) proposed ambulance fee.

Now, Councilman George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park is trying to win Councilman Philip M. Andrews' vote.

Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg strongly opposes the fee, which is being recommended as a way to bring in about \$14.7 million in revenue toward County Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) proposed fiscal 2011 budget.

During a meeting between the council and Leggett on Tuesday, Andrews was discussing his bill to remove a type of pension obligation from the county budget.

Leventhal said he would vote for Andrews' bill, which would repeal so-called "ghost COLAs," if Andrews supported the ambulance fee.

The council has been divided over the fee in the past, with the majority of the council voting down the revenue-generating measure.

Leggett says the county could raise additional revenue through a \$450 fee charged out-of-county residents who use county ambulance services. The insurance companies of county

residents would be billed for the fee; county residents, including those who don't have insurance, wouldn't have to pay the fee.

Following Leventhal's proposal, Andrews said his bill was a "good idea," but that an ambulance fee was a "bad idea."

"If we're serious, they're all good ideas," said Councilman Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown, who has said the county needs to make further budget cuts and address its structural budget deficit.